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Lucia A Keegan 09/05/2006 05:27:36 PM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 005851

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iran Iraq Lebanon and the Middle
East
PARIS - Thursday, August 31, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iran
Iraq
Lebanon and the Middle East

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Iran's new challenge to the West is the lead story in today's
Liberation which headlines "Iran Master of the Game" and adds that
"Tehran, feeling untouchable, has launched a new phase in its
uranium enrichment phase." The editorial by Gerard Dupuy entitled
"Powerlessness" fingers the UN, the U.S. and the West in general
comments: "Rarely has the world's establishment, the UNSC, been so
openly challenged..." A separate article analyzes the divisions
within the Bush Administration on Iran, pointing to the neo-cons'
opposition to Secretary Rice's pro-dialogue stance with Iran. In Le

Figaro, Alain Barluet reiterates that "Iran is ignoring the major powers." (See Part C)

La Croix leads with Iraq and the headline: "The Militia War Is Bleeding Iraq." In his editorial Dominique Gerbaud asks "How to be an Iraqi?" as he analyzes the ethnic, religious and tribal make up of Iraq. He concludes: "The Iraqis have a Constitution, a government and a soccer team, but they have no state and no feeling of being first and foremost Iraqis." Inside, the lead article is entitled "The U.S. Wants to Win the Battle of Baghdad" but underscores that "the declarations made by the U.S. and the Iraqi government have intensified the terrorist's level of violence because they are determined to sabotage their security plan for Baghdad." (See Part C) In Liberation, a cartoon shows President Bush saying to Secretary Rumsfeld: "So, in Iraq, we're putting an end to the carnage?" To which Secretary Rumsfeld says: "Patience: as soon as the last suicide bomber has killed himself, victory is ours." The editorial board in Les Echos reviews a novel on Iraq in which the hero turns to resisting the U.S. army after a "violent and arrogant village search by the army of occupation... (The hero's reaction) helps us to understand better why the American plan for Iraq was not a viable one. It is not a matter of politics, as the naive neo-con strategists who led Bush into this disaster believed. It is a matter of culture... While the author understands that thousand year old traditions cannot be changed overnight, President Bush has yet to."

Kofi Annan's visit to Israel and Olmert's refusal to lift the blockade are announced on the front page of Le Figaro, which adds: "Kofi Annan left Israel empty handed." (See Part C) The UN Secretary General was interviewed this morning on Europe 1 radio: "The leaders I met feel that the international community can help them. This is a good opportunity to establish a long-lasting peace." On the blockade, he said that "there is a lot of work to do, but the situation can still evolve; it has to... The situation is still fragile but it will get better when UNIFIL is deployed in the region..." He also said "the Palestinians and their suffering were not forgotten..." On his trip to Syria and Iran, he said that "if it can help peace, I must convince those who can play a role in the region and try to make them understand that there are rules that must be accepted by the international community," adding: "sometimes we have to shake hands to save lives."

French thinker Dominique Moisi points to the issue of Israeli security as a source of tension in transatlantic relations. (See Part C)

Les Echos announces today's international conference in Stockholm on Lebanon's reconstruction, estimated between 3 and 15 billion dollars. Les Echos interviews former Lebanese Finance Minister Georges Corm, whose estimate leans towards the lower figure.

Le Monde interviews the head of UNIFIL operations, Jean-Marie Guehenno: "A peacekeeping operation must always use force as a last recourse and not as a first response. We are counting on the Lebanese government to take on all of its responsibilities. But we will have the means to ensure that we are not pushed around, and we will not let ourselves be pushed around... Over the course of its existence, the UNIFIL has lost almost 300 soldiers; no peacekeeping mission is without risks."

Domestic news leads with the continuing downward trend for unemployment, which has dropped under the 9% mark, the lowest in five years according to Le Figaro. PM Villepin is expected to make several announcements to boost employment in companies with fewer than 20 employees.

Today's second domestic story revolves around the Socialist Party and the latest poll which shows that Segolene Royal has lost 7 percentage points from 54 to 47% after the party's summer university. Says Le Parisien: "This is a first for her." Le Parisien's poll also shows that all other socialist contenders for the presidential party nomination have dropped in popularity, except for former PM Lionel Jospin. Le Figaro publishes polling results from weekly Le Point, highlighting the commanding leads enjoyed by Royal and Interior Minister Sarkozy in their respective camps (PS: 57% Sgolhne Royal, 15% Lionel Jospin, 11% Dominique Strauss-Kahn, 9% Jack Lang; vice UMP: 78% Nicolas Sarkozy, 10% Dominique de Villepin, 6% Michhle Alliot-Marie, 6% Jean-Louis Borloo).

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Iran

"Powerlessness"

Gerard Dupuy in left-of-center Liberation (08/31): "Iran is demonstrating its determination to acquire the bomb by launching a new phase in the enrichment program... Rarely has the planetary establishment, i.e. the UNSC, been so openly challenged and scorned... No one believes in the sanctions that will eventually be imposed: they are too easily by-passed... Because they know this, Bush's hawks are openly dreaming of a new war, a repeat of Iraq for Iran. This particular danger seems to have been avoided. And while we have no choice but to accept the UN's dysfunction when it comes to regional crises, when it comes to the atomic bomb... the situation is hardly the same... The UN's powerlessness is primarily the result of the West's, especially the U.S.'s impotence. The ban on atomic weapons would be more credible if eight other nations did not already have the bomb... In Iran's case, possession of the bomb is made worse because it stands as a symbol of Iran's aggressive ideology against one of the UN members, Israel, and because it opens the door to nuttier regimes, such as North Korea's. Yesterday we took one more step towards the imbalance of terror."

"The Bush Administration Divided"

Philippe Grangereau in left-of-center Liberation (08/31): "Can the U.S., in the long run, launch a military attack on Iran to keep the third member of the 'axis of evil' from acquiring the bomb? The White House, the Pentagon and American intelligence are grappling with this question. The Iranian crisis has considerably divided the Bush Administration since Secretary Rice opted on May 31st to put an end to Washington's policy of non-dialogue with Iran and to work with the EU... Since then, according to Philip Gordon of the Brookings Institute, 'Secretary Rice has become an object of hatred for the Administration's neo-conservatives...' But Gordon also believes the U.S. will pursue the diplomatic path, because the Pentagon does not know where Iran's nuclear installations are located, the collateral damage of a strike would be considerable and the diplomatic cost too high."

Iraq

"How to be an Iraqi?"

Dominique Gerbaud in Catholic La Croix (08/31): "A car bombing in Baghdad is not even news anymore. The Americans, whose interest is not to boost the figures, note an average of five violent attacks everyday in the Iraqi capital... Since the US-led intervention began, 50,000 civilian Iraqis have been killed in this civil war... The cycle of reprisals by the various ethnic groups is leading Iraq into chaos... The Iraqis are at war among themselves because they have not been given the necessary tools for reconciliation... The Constitution is not enough to create a feeling of unity among the different ethnic, religious and tribal groups... Such unity will be impossible as long as the country is occupied by a foreign power... The Iraqis have a Constitution, a government and a soccer team, but they have no state and no feeling of being first and foremost Iraqis."

Lebanon and the Middle East

"Olmert Refuses to Lift Blockade"

Patrick Saint-Paul in right-of-center Le Figaro (08/31): "Kofi Annan has walked away from Jerusalem empty handed, despite his goodwill effort. His request that the blockade be lifted was rejected by Israel's PM. Things might have been different if Annan had been able to bring news from Lebanon that the kidnapped Israeli soldiers were alive."

"The Middle East and Europe's Weakness"

Dominique Moisi, Director of IFRI in right-of-center Les Echos (08/31): "When it comes to the transatlantic relationship, nothing is more potentially a source of tension than the issue of Israel's security. From this point of view and despite the rapprochement between the US and France... the latest conflict in the Middle East has served to widen the psychological rift that has divided Europe and America since the onset of the war in Iraq... The end of the 'love story' between Israel and Europe... is an added element to a generalized trend rather than the result of a single event... The

European opposition to an ever stronger alliance between Israel and the US as well as the integration and sensibility of a large Muslim population in Europe explain in part this disenchantment."

STAPLETON